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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 001060

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STATE FOR WHA/BSC, WHA/CAR

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SUBJECT: CHILEAN CONGRESS EXTENDS CHILEAN PRESENCE IN HAITI

REF: SANTIAGO 01022

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Emi L. Yamauchi. Reasons: 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Chile's Senate voted on May 17 to extend Chile's troop deployment in Haiti beyond June 30 for six months. The GOC is not required to seek another congressional vote to extend the deployment for an additional six months as long as a UN mandate is in place, according to a Chilean Senate staff member. The Bachelet administration agreed to provide the Senate monthly briefings on developments in Haiti in exchange for the backing of one of the opposition parties. Unlike last year's vote, this vote was not unanimous: the rightist Independent Democratic Union senators abstained, expressing concerns about the lack of an "end date" for the withdrawal of Chile's troops. End summary.

¶2. (U) Chile's Senate voted on May 17 to extend Chile's troop deployment in Haiti beyond June 30 for six additional months. Twenty-nine of the 34 senators present voted in favor of the motion; five -- all from the rightist opposition Independent Democratic Union (UDI) party -- abstained. The vote came after the Bachelet government agreed in writing to meet one of the demands of the National Renewal party (a center-right party and UDI's coalition partner) and brief the Senate monthly on developments in Haiti. These briefings, which according to one Ministry of Defense contact could be provided in writing, are to include assessments of the political situation in Haiti, the GOC's ability to provide for the security and well-being of the Chilean troops, the cost of the Chilean deployment, and MINUSTAH's progress. According to press reports, the agreement also establishes that Chile's troop presence in Haiti will be allowed only as long as there is a UN mandate.

¶3. (U) Chilean government officials celebrated the vote as an example of Chile's commitment to supporting democracy in Haiti. Foreign Minister Foxley said publicly, "Countries that truly wish to have influence and success in the global world need to understand that they must exercise their influence, presence and voice in a responsible manner." Minister of Defense Blanlot characterized the vote as an "acknowledgment in the government, Congress and in the international community that our (Chilean) troops have done an extraordinary job."

¶4. (U) National Renewal (RN) Senator and former Senate President Sergio Romero, who the press credited with brokering the deal with the GOC, and who voted in favor of last year's motion, described the agreement as a "precedent"

for Congress in establishing an "equilibrium" with the executive branch. Romero acknowledged he had concluded the agreement without the approval of the UDI senators, but said his Alianza coalition partners were informed of the agreement after its conclusion and before the Senate vote. UDI senators explained their abstentions by arguing that the answers to the problems in Haiti were "not military," and the GOC had not yet devised a system for the withdrawal of the Chilean troops.

15. (C) Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chief of Staff Julio Camara told Poloff on May 18 that the government would not have to seek further congressional authorization before extending the deployment for an additional six months beyond December 2006 -- as long as a UN mandate was in place. The GOC only has to "inform" the Senate of its intention to do so. Camara noted this was the same arrangement the GOC and the Senate reached in May 2005 (when the Senate last voted to extend Chile's presence). However, the GOC and the RN Senators reached an "understanding" this time around that the GOC would "inform" the Senate during its regular briefings between now and December 2006 if the government intended to extend Chile's troop deployment beyond December, to give the senators an opportunity to voice their concerns. Camara said there was an understanding between the government and Congress that Chilean troops would be needed in Haiti for at least one more year.

16. (C) Camara confirmed press reports that the GOC-RN agreement was "key" to persuading the RN senators to vote in favor of the measure. The Bachelet government had enough votes in the Senate (20 of the 38) to pass the measure on its own, but recognized the importance of maintaining bipartisan support for Chile's participation in Haiti and for the Chilean troops themselves. Camara commented that there was less debate in the Senate than last year, which he attributed to the successful elections in Haiti and the peaceful transfer of power to President Preval. It appeared to him that UDI's abstentions were closer to "no" votes, and reflected the party's concerns over the "militarization" of Haiti, and the lack of a set date for the withdrawal of Chilean troops.

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